

PRI Public Hearing 2014 Study Updates on School Paras  
& Transtn Serv for Youth with ASD

Testimony from Karen Linder, 2 Brookside Drive, Clinton CT 06413

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Karen Linder. I am from Clinton CT. I am here on behalf of my 16 year old son, Henry. Henry was diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder when he was 8 years old. There are multiple urgent transition service needs I am sure will be discussed today. I am here to express concern with the lack of meaningful services and the lack of adequate funding for the transition services I've been led to believe exist under the Bureau of Rehabilitative Services or BRS. I am here to ask you for increased funding of transition programs and services, including those under BRS. Statistically, we know the number of young adults with an Autism Spectrum Disorder 16 years and older is increasing. Statistically, we know that the unemployment rate for people on the Autism Spectrum is identified as 80%. As a kindergartener, before Henry knew how to read, he stated he would get a job as a security guard because they did not have to read - they monitored security cameras. The importance of having a job was something Henry understood and aspired to at age 5. As a high school sophomore, Henry wants to get a part time job now. It weighs on him that most 16 year olds have a part time job, but he does not. As an individual with Autism, Henry is struggling to figure out how to get a job. Henry does not know how to find a job that would be a good fit for him. He does not know how to interview successfully for a job. Henry needs help, including how to read and correctly interpret nonverbal communication. As a person with Autism, Henry does not have the ability to observe the behavior of others in a work place and adjust his behavior. Henry needs counseling about career and employment options, he needs services including job placement, job coaching, and employment training. Henry made need supported employment and customized employment may best meet his thoughts about his future work.

Last year when Henry was 15 and a high school freshman, we contacted BRS to apply for school to work transition services. We were very discouraged to hear that Henry was too young. We were told BRS did not have the resources or funding to work with high school students before they were seniors in high school. We were very discouraged when we were advised that given Henry's profile and his average IQ that it was unlikely he would qualify for services. We were told that BRS resources are limited and that services are provided to persons with the most significant disabilities via "the Order of Selection" process. We were confused because the message we received from multiple state agencies stated that transition should begin by age 14 and part of his transition IEP included work experiences in the community and engagement with BRS as the applicable state agency. Henry is a young man who has been trying to find his place and trying to figure out his future employment and a career since the age of 5. Henry is a young man interested in working today, gaining experience and learning the valuable soft employment skills that people with Autism struggle with. But, Henry needs assistance in gaining these employment skills and experiences. Assistance that we've been led to believe BRS would provide to Henry. I request the development of meaningful and adequately funded transition services for Connecticut's growing population of adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Connecticut spends millions of dollars on special education, but without access to meaningful transition services and programs, young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders will be stranded at home. Henry wants to work, but he needs transition services now. Thank you.